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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000720

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: INCOMING FATAH PLC MEMBERS TAKE 'WAIT AND SEE'
APPROACH WITH HAMAS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In separate February 15 meetings with ConGen Poloff, newly elected Fatah Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) members Dr. Emile Jarjou'i and Dr. Bernard Sabella, urged caution from both Fatah and the international community in its approach toward the incoming Hamas-led government. Jarjou'i indicated that Fatah would not join Hamas in a National Unity Government and would instead form the opposition in the PLC. On Hamas governance, Jarjou'i expected Hamas to perform in the same organized and disciplined manner that it displayed in the run-up to the elections. Sabella expressed concern that Fatah's absence from the government could place the movement in an even weaker position in the event that Hamas performs well in running the Palestinian Authority (PA). Jarjou'i and Sabella agreed that significant changes needed to occur within Fatah in order for the movement to present an effective challenge to Hamas, but suggested that the Sixth Fatah Congress would take place no earlier than the end of the year. End summary.

Jarjou'i: Fatah to
Remain in Opposition

¶2. (C) Dr. Emile Jarjou'i (a member of the PLO Executive Committee), retained his PLC seat in the January 25 elections by winning one of the two allotted Christian seats for Jerusalem (Sabella won the other Christian seat). Jarjou'i told Poloff that the scheduled February 18 inauguration of the new PLC would provide the first indication as to how Hamas will approach its role in the legislative body and in the formation of the Palestinian cabinet. Based on conversations that incoming Fatah PLC members had with Abu Mazen on February 11 in Ramallah, Jarjou'i expected that Fatah would not join Hamas in a National Unity Government nor assume any leadership positions within the PLC. He described PLC member Azzam al-Ahmad -- who was chosen over Muhammad Dahlan by Fatah PLC members in a February 11 vote -- as well qualified to head the Fatah opposition in the Council.

¶3. (C) Jarjou'i said that he had no prior relationship with the four incoming Hamas PLC members from Jerusalem who won seats in the district elections. He was more familiar with Jerusalemite Muhammad Abu Tir, the number two person on the Hamas national list behind Ismai'l Hanniyah. Despite having limited knowledge regarding the incoming Hamas members to the PLC, Jarjou'i expected that the movement would show a similar degree of organization and discipline witnessed during the run-up to the legislative elections.

Sabella Taking New
PLC Role in Stride

14. (C) Bethlehem University Sociology Professor Dr. Bernard Sabella, who won the other Christian seat in Jerusalem, told ConGen Poloff that he was just coming to terms with his new role as a member of the PLC. While eager to engage directly with, and work for the benefit of, his Jerusalem constituency, Sabella said that he was still unsure about the role he would play in the legislative body. (Note: The Jerusalem district includes residents of East Jerusalem and the surrounding Palestinian villages to the north and east of the city. Both Jarjou'i and Sabella received less than 6,000 votes each in the elections, which lagged well behind the top vote recipients of Hamas, but proved sufficient to attain seats under the Christian quota. End note.) Sabella said that he had been informed that, in his capacity as a member of the PLC, he would be provided a secretary, bodyguard, and driver. He joked that he had less

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need for a bodyguard than someone with an academic degree who could help sort out the contours of his constituency. Sabella said that he intended to spend the next few months talking to Palestinians to learn their needs before coming out with a specific agenda.

Sabella Advocates
Cautious Approach

15. (C) Sabella worried that threats to cut off international financial assistance to Palestinians under a Hamas-led government would punish ordinary Palestinians already burdened by high unemployment and limited economic prospects. He thought it was unreasonable to expect Hamas to change its political positions within two to three months. Instead, practical solutions were required to help the quality of life for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza

while allowing Hamas time to live up to prior international commitments.

16. (C) Sabella suggested that a purported USG/Israeli plan toward Hamas, as reported in the February 14 "New York Times" article, would backfire because it would inflame Palestinian sentiments to the detriment of Fatah. Alternatively, Sabella argued that there were legitimate reasons for Fatah to join the next government, which, at a minimum, would allow Fatah to avoid further marginalization. While he acknowledged that the majority of Fatah opposed joining the government, he thought that such a tactic left Fatah with few good alternatives. Like Jarjou'i, Sabella was unfamiliar with the Hamas PLC colleagues from Jerusalem, but nonetheless expected a close working relationship with them in the council.

Long Road For
Fatah Rehabilitation

17. (C) Both Jarjou'i and Sabella expressed confidence in Abu Mazen's leadership, noting that Abu Mazen had taken a firm line with respect to calling on Hamas to uphold prior international commitments. Internally, Abu Mazen faced a tougher challenge with Fatah. Neither expected the Sixth Fatah Congress to occur in March, as originally scheduled. Rather, both expected the Sixth Congress to convene no earlier than the end of the year. Sabella said that the results of the elections should signal a "wake-up call" for Fatah, adding that Fatah needed to show better discipline whereby the political agenda would rise above the special interests of the individual members. Fatah's ability to match Hamas on the national list (29 seats for Hamas versus 28 seats for Fatah) suggested to Sabella that Fatah still maintained support among the grassroots. Jarjou'i also anticipated a long struggle ahead for Fatah to regain its leading role in the Palestinian national movement.

WALLES